**BASIC ELEMENTS OF A POLITICAL SYSTEM**

Before we delve into the main focus of this presentation, it is mandatory to have foundational information on what a political system is. Thus, a political system is a set of formal legal institutions that constitute a “government” or a “state.” This is the definition adopted by many studies of the legal or constitutional arrangements of advanced political orders. The term not only encompasses the legal organization of the state but also the reality of how the state functions. More broadly defined, the political system is seen as a set of “processes of interaction” or as a subsystem of the social system interacting with other non-political subsystems, such as the economic system. This points to the importance of informal socio-political processes and emphasizes the study of political development.

They are also the set of formal institution and practices that define a government structure. It can also be said to be the coordinated set of principles, laws, ideas and procedures relating to a particular form of government or the form of government itself.

According to renowned political scientists, **Gabriel Almond and James Coleman (1960),** political system is that system of interactions to be found in all independent societies which performs the functions of integration and adaptation by means of legitimate physical compulsion. A political system is composed of members of the social group who are in power and it is usually compared to the legal system, economic system, cultural system and other social systems. As also said, political system is a framework which defines acceptable political methods within a society.

In political science, a political system defines the process for making official government decisions. It is usually compared to the legal system, economic system, cultural system, and other social systems.

**THE MAJOR ELEMENTS OF A POLITICAL SYSTEM**

THE most general definition of politics is that politics is the form of interrelations among classes, social groups and nations, a form directly or indirectly connected with the manifestation and implementation of power.

What are the ultimate objectives of the political party at a given historical stage in a given country? What are the conditions for achieving these aims and how does the party associate the struggle for achieving them with the international objectives of the working class?  
With the Marxist-Leninist theory as its guide, and proceeding from its programme the party works out its policies and tactics. The party’s policies concern all questions bearing on the interests of all the working masses.

The party’s tactics are the ways it implements its political line. The political party has its rules on the basis of which it is built as a single firm organization. The party ideologically, the rules do so organizationally. They determine the forms of the party’s organization, the methods of its work, the standards of its internal life and the principles of its leadership. They indicate who may and must be admitted to the party, the rights and duties of the party structure from top to bottom and the interrelations between its higher and lower bodies.  
The political system permits, in my view, inclusion in one system of all the basic categories and concepts describing the political life of society. Beginning from this category, investigators are able to move by degrees toward increasingly focused and differentiated political categories, devising a set of characteristics subject to verification by clear and logical determination.  
A political system is one of the structures of society, alongside the economic and intellectual systems, set apart by the activity by social groups.

The political system is distinguished from other social systems, first, by its supremacy. It exercises supreme power in society, its decisions are obligatory for all society and for each of its systems. The basic function of the political system is to mobilise resources for the attainment of goals that are set for society by its leading socio-class forces. Its principal characteristic is power. Compare this with the economic system, which is concerned above all with the production of goods and services and is directed to the satisfaction of society’s demands, or with the intellectual system, the prime function of which is the adaptation of individuals through the establishment of behavioural norms and models.  
Second, the political system interacts with other socio-economic structures of society. Wielding supreme power in society, the political system is nevertheless the superstructure, predetermined by society’s economic and social bases.

The third specific characteristic of the political system is its relative autonomy, determined by the special mechanism of group structures, roles and functions. The political system is the most formal of society’s representative institutions. Relations within it are as a rule governed by special norms, both legal and political.  
Fourth, the influence of the political system on all of society is more active than the influence of any other of society’s structures, which follows from the fact that it has supreme power and the opportunity to dispose of society’s resources.  
These properties are true of the political system of any society. They have social substance in every socio-economic formation at every stage of its development.  
We should distinguish the basic functions of the political system from its special hallmarks. These functions are:

1) the determination of society’s goals and tasks;

2) the mobilisation of resources;

3) the integration of all elements of society;

u4) legitimisation, by which is meant the correspondence of political life as practised to official political and legal norms.

The establishment of goals and the mobilisation of resources to meet them are the principal functions of the political system, while integration and legitimisation are functions both of the political and of other social systems. On the basis of these characteristics, we can analyse not only the institutional, but also the behavioural aspects of political life.  
The constituent elements of political life should be distinguished from its distinguishing marks and parameters. I suggest four groups of elements of the political system of socialist society, corresponding to their roles and functions:

1) political organisations;

2) political norms;

3) political relations;

4) political consciousness.

One can consider those institutions of social life, groups, norms, functions and roles that interact closely with political administration as elements of the political system. From the point of view of the roles and functions carried out by specific elements of the political system, one can distinguish between non-functional elements, those that have an exclusively political function, such as political parties and functional elements, for which the political function is only one of many. We must note the presence of episodic political functions or interactions in those institutions, organisations and groups for which politics is not an important function, such as scientific societies, etc.  
There are political aspects in the behaviour of almost all contemporary institutions, communities and individuals. However, only those institutions that interact strongly with power and administration and for which such activity is an essential characteristic are elements of the political system.

In the works of Marx and Engels, we meet, too, the concept “political structure,” which is used principally as a synonym for “state” in the broad sense of the word.  
Thus, the concept of the “political system” is broader than the concept of “state” in the accepted, narrow sense of the word. But it is also broader than the concept of the “political organisation of society,” though the latter is the most essential element of the political system. It is through political organisations that the principal goals of society are set, that political policy is determined, that political and legal norms are formulated, that society as a whole is mobilized. But the political system, as already mentioned, cannot be reduced to society’s political organisations. Real political life and political relations are much broader than the activity of political organisations. They include, in addition to political and legal norms, the political relations of various social communities, e.g., the working collective, that describe the process by which the political system functions.  
We should now look in more detail at the elements of the political system of developed socialist society in their interaction.

**ELEMENTS of a political system**

* **IDEOLOGY:**

This constitutes an integrated system of beliefs and symbols and are meant to influence the sentiments of the followers. Different political parties profess different ideologies which are internalized by their adherents. Ideology may be based on political, economic, religious elements. In diffused societies political ideologies will have religious and economic bearings.

COMMON POLITICAL IDEOLOGY EXAMPLES:

1. Political parties embody a range of ideals covering government, economics, education, healthcare, foreign policy, and more. Some examples are Republican, Democrat, and libertarian.
2. Classical liberalism is a capitalist ideology which stands for a limited government with political freedom, civil liberties and laissez-faire economic policies.
3. Social or modern liberalism is liberalism which focuses on social and economic issues while ensuring individual freedom.
4. Social democracy advocates a peaceful change from capitalism to socialism with a representative democracy including collective bargaining and public services.
5. Neo-liberalism embodies free trade, privatization, deregulation ad laissez-faire economic policies.
6. Leninism focused on a proletariat dictatorship based on Lenin’s theories of government.
7. Communism promotes collective ownership of property with one political party controlling social and economic policy.
8. Trotskyism advocated a revolution of the working class bringing freedom and democracy.
9. Stalinism is an authoritarian ideology with one person having all the power. In Stalinism, political and ideological dissidents are strongly suppressed.
10. Maoism emphasizes the revolutionary power of the peasants and was the interpretation of Marxist and Lenin theories by Mao Zedong.

* **STRUCTURE:**

Political structure is influenced by the prevailing (rulers) ideology and the values and the level of development of society. In general sense, it refers to institutions or groups and their relations to each other, their patterns of interaction within political systems and to political regulations, laws and the norms present in political systems in such a way that they constitute the political landscape of the political entity.

In the social domain, its counterpart is social structure. Political structure is also ways in whivh the government is run.

**TYPES OF POLITICAL STRUCTURES**

According to Edward Shills, there are three main types of political systems, these are discussed as the:

1. TOTALITARIAN SYSTEM:

This is a system in which the state controls and regulates all phases of life considered essential for perpetuating its power and for carrying out programmes arbitrarily. It is the most extreme form of authoritarianism. Unlike democracies, where a variety of groups struggle for a voice in government, the government dictates the **society’s values, ideology, rules and form of government** which are elements that make part of the political system.

Societies having totalitarian system do not permit dissent. The centralized authority always dominates over the autonomy of individual or sub-groups within the society. **Mussolini’s Italy**, **Hitler’s Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union** are often quoted as examples of totalitarian states.

Totalitarian states are ruled by one political party that organizes the citizens into a unified group. In practice, the state is represented by a politically powerful ruling class or elite that dominates all other interest groups.

Information is restricted or denied by complete control of mass media, close monitoring of citizens and visitors.

1. AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEM:

This political structure is less controlling than totalitarianism, but still denying citizens the right to participate in government. A dictatorship, in which the primary authority rests in one individual, represents one type of authoritarian government.

Dictators rule in China, Cuba, Ethiopia, Haiti, and many African nations. In these systems, strong militaries and political parties support the dictators. Another form of authoritarianism is **monarchy**, in which the primary authority rests in a family and is passed down through generations. In the past, most monarchies exerted near absolute power-----in Saudi Arabia, the ruling family still does. Most remaining monarchies today, however, such as those in the Scandinavian nations, Great Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands, are **constitutional monarchies** where the royal families serve only as symbolic heads of state. Parliament or some form of democratic electoral process truly govern these nation states.

1. DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM:

In its broadest sense, democracy is a way of life in which an individual feels free to act within accepted boundaries of norms and also equal in respects of his/her rights. In the narrower or deeper sense, it is a form of government, a power in which people govern themselves.

People participate in the government through their representatives that they elect. In other words, people represent themselves and take their own decisions. It is an imagination of the replica of an equalitarian society.

In political science, a political system defines the process for making official government decisions. It is usually compared to the legal system, economic system, cultural system, and other social systems.

However, this is a very simplified view of a much more complex system of categories involving the questions of who should have authority and what the government influence on its people and economy should.

Most democracies today rely upon a system of representatives to make decisions. The most common examples of democracies are the United States, Canada, Germany, and many other European nations.

* **PROCESS**:

Through the interaction between and within political systems emerge political processes. These are interactions between individuals and groups within the policy executive, legislature, judiciary bureaucracy etc.

For example, voting is a political process. This is where the desires of the people are transmitted to the people who run their government. But this is not the only political process. The process of campaigning is also a political process where the people who want to be in government communicate with the people. In the campaign process, the people learn what candidates think and they respond. Candidates learn about the people’s opinion through things like focus groups and opinion polls. The process of lobbying is another political process where the people or at least representatives of various interest groups that are made up of people to interact with the government.

The process of lobbying is another political process. Once again, the lobbyists let officials know what the members of the interest group are thinking and the government officials can give feedbacks about what they hear.

OTHER ELEMENTS INCLUDE:

* **Comprehensiveness:** political system is comprehensive in nature as it covers all the interactions and relationships from the formal, as well as informal institutions in a society
* **Interdependency:** This means that when the properties of one component or part of a system change, all the other components and systems as a whole are affected. In a political system, since the political parties have a wilder base and the mass media (television, radio and newspaper) change the performance of all other structures and affect the general works of the system.
* **Interaction:** the political system consists of interacting roles of nation, subjects, voters who play their role in political systems. Political systems not only include governmental institutions like the legislative, executive and the judiciary but all structures in their aspects.
* **FUNCTION**:

Specification of different functions within the political system is a characteristic of a modern political system.

According to Almond and Coleman (1960):

1. To maintain integration of society by determining norms.
2. To adapt and change elements of social, economic, religious systems necessary for achieving collective (political goals).
3. To protect the integrity of political system from outside threats.

These two men grouped these functions into two categories:

1. **INPUT funtions:** political socialization, interest articulation, interest aggregation, and political communication.
2. **OUTPUT functions:** Rule making, rule application and rule adjudication.

**Eisenstadt (1966**) has classified the functions of a political system as: legislative, decision making, and administrative.

* **LEGITIMACY BASIS:**

For the state of exercise power and make the individuals submit to its authority, it must legitimize its power. The ways to legitimize authority, according to Weber is derived through traditional, charismatic and legal basis.

In political science, legitimacy is the right and acceptance of an authority, usually a governing law or regime. An authority viewed as legitimate often has the right and justification to exercise power. Political legitimacy is considered a basic condition for governing, without which a government will suffer legislative deadlocks and collapse. In political structures, there are different legitimacy systems:

1. TRADITIONAL LEGITIMACY
2. CHARISMATIC LEGITIMACY
3. RATIONAL-LEGAL LEGITIMACY

**Traditional Legitimacy** derives from societal custom and habit that emphasizes the history of the authority of tradition. Traditionalists understand this form of rule as historically accepted, hence its continuity, because it is the way society has always been. Therefore, the institutions of traditional government usually are historically continuous, as in monarchy and tribalism.

**Charismatic Legitimacy** derives from the ideas and personal charisma of the leader, a person whose authoritative persona charms and psychologically dominates the people of the society to agreement with the government’s regime and rule. A charismatic government usually features weak political and administrative institutions, because they derive authority from the persona of the leader and usually authority from the persona of the leader in power.

**Rational-Legal Legitimacy** derives from a system of institutional procedure, wherein government institutions establish and enforce law and order in the public interest. Therefore, it is through public trust that the government will abide the law that confers rational-legal legitimacy.